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ABSTRACT

Noting that teachers must devise writing situations that help students see possibilities for revision beyond mechanics and usage, this paper describes several exercises that will help students use the computer or word processor as a tool for assisting them when they write. The exercises, which can be done with or without a microcomputer, with a local area network (LAN), or with time-sharing mini- or mainframe computers, include the following: (1) writing a variation on the themes of a poem on borrowing, (2) generating as many translations as possible of Latin sentences from history and literature, (3) altering sentences with the students' own language, (4) inserting interior monologues into historical speeches or literary soliloquies, (5) writing both a speech or scolding and an interior monologue of the listener's reactions, and (6) writing reactions to the work of peers. The paper also describes ways in which the computer has been successfully incorporated into the classroom and into the English curriculum. Samples of the exercises are appended. (HTH)

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Beyond Correctness: The Computer and the Composing Process

by Michael O. Stegman

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The latest newsletter from the New York State Department of Education indicates that when students revise their essays the highest number of corrections are grouped around mechanics and usage. Knowing that, I think it is apparently necessary to devise writing situations that help students to see other possibilities for revision. That is not to say that mechanics and word usage have no role in revision. After all, I agree with Donald Hall's comment in Writing Well that "a change in style, however slight, is a change in meaning, however slight;" nevertheless, I would like to focus a student's efforts beyond correctness.

Today, I want to tell you about some of the ideas that I have come up with to encourage students to think of the computer as a tool for assisting them when they write.

A few years ago, when I first began to use the computer in my classroom, I referred to word processing as an Engl[illegible]h teacher's Pac-Man. As I began to become more comfortable with the machine, I thought of the computer as a number two Ticonderoga pencil with a very elaborate eraser.

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All of this was before I was forced back on my own ideas so that I could provide meaningful writing experiences for my students. I soon felt that the two metaphors I used to conceive of the computer in an English class offered me no help with planning Monday's classes. I went looking for software, but our mini-computer cannot take advantage of the burgeoning education market. Besides, I've heard that the wizards at Apple knew they had spelled the word Macintosh incorrectly (a raincoat not an apple), and made a deliberate choice to stay with the misspelling. It was a mistake I figured they would make; they are, after all, computer programmers and that cadre seem to be afflicted with a large number of people who can program well, but can't spell. Fortuitously, the mistake has also allowed them to link MacPaint, MacWrite, and all of the other Macs with the biggest Mac of them all--MacDonald's.

What I would like to share with you now are some of the lessons I have devised for the fourth aspects of composing that my students do or will do with the computer: learning to use a word processor.

I should mention that all of these lessons can be done without a computer, can be done with a microcomputer, can be done with a LAN (Local Area Network), and finally, can be done with time-sharing mini or mainframe computers. I will remind you of the adaptations that apply to each situation

so that you can feel comfortable with all of the lessons, no matter what situation you face. Further, these lessons are not machine specific, but I have designed them to take the fullest advantage of the system I am currently working on (a Digital PDP 11/44 using EEC's LEX-11 word processing program), a system that has the wonderful advantage of not being able to run a single software package that is compatible with the IBM-PC or the Apple IIe, or a Commodore, or any Atari. I enjoy a program as blank as a piece of paper.

To capitalize on the computer's forte--mindless repetition--I have tried to devise mindfully repetitive tasks to teach word processing concepts. And so, I begin with two easy examples, ones I call "May I Borrow" and "Erasmus Variations." The first is based on Adrian Mitchell's poem "Ten Ways to Avoid Lending your Wheelbarrow."

After I present the poem to the class, students complete the assignment using the computer which has been programmed with Mitchell's formula for the poem, and then prompts them to supply an adjective describing an emotion, an object that can be loaned, and a reason not to loan it. (I should warn you that not all of the poem is suitable for a class; and so, I read it aloud freely editing the one section that could be objectionable. I have no compunctions about this since the poem still lives without one line.) Groups of students can work together on this also, each

person triggering more emotions and more outlandish reasons. In the end, they have produced a poem that mimics Mitchell's, learned how to work with the computer, played with the nuance of various words (including the role of a Thesaurus as an aid to invention), and considered that there is more than one way to do something--a worthwhile task to recall later when sentence revising is a topic.

The second activity--"Erasmus Variations"-- uses the idea of repetition from "May I Borrow" in a slightly more sophisticated way. Here the task is to write as many variations on Erasmus' sentence as possible, adding one crucial element: an author for each variation. (See appendix.) Again, the computer can prompt the students with the original sentence, an example or two (at the start), and the reminder to include an author for the variation. The student can either alter Erasmus' words slightly, keeping the syntax intact, or depart from the model as needed. In all cases, the choices that a student makes emphasize the possibility for variation in sentences, the impact of word choices on meaning, and the fun of invention.

The most sophisticated use of the ideas in these two activities is an assignment I call "Portrait Medley." (See appendix.) In it, students are encouraged to generate as many translations as possible for the Latin epigraph that opens Joyce's A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man.

Obviously, this is not a book that would be taught in all classes; still, the completion of this assignment can rely on a computer, too. The further benefit is that this activity forms the basis for discussing the ideas of the entire novel, since each variation can, given the nuances of each choice, be connected to different scenes in the novel and underscore my favorite point: The whole of a novel can be found in any of its smallest significant pieces.

Fine, I hear you thinking, but what if I don't have something as versatile and elaborate as a mini-computer? Am I lost?

I think not. If you are working with a LAN set-up, then you might store all of the above assignments in a place where students can access the assignment for their own use. In a setting where there are only micro-computers, why not have a class diskette that contains all of the assignments as well as a document that offers a quick annotated bibliography and how-to-use pointers? Students can then take the diskette, copy it onto their own and go on working. If there are not enough computers for each student, consider doing these first assignments as group projects. When my students work at the Erasmus variations in class, the writing gets better and better as they trade up on their hits (gales of laughter from the rest of the group) and get instant reactions (lighthearted "yucks," and boos) for any

misses. Finally, if you have no computers in your room, none nearby, and a Luddite administration, then rely on the ditto. The assignments still work.

Thus far, the preceding assignments have relied more on external sources than on a student's own initiative. The next two groups of assignments --"Sensory Sentence Patterns" and Sentence Medley"-- each encourage students to develop themselves as their own best source of ideas and variations. The first uses Christiansen's ideas from "A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence," and even uses some of his examples, to encourage students to explore the potential of the accumulative sentence. Through directions, examples from each sense and my own attempts, students then complete the assignments through modelling. The computer screen presents the originals that we have discussed in class and any changes students make can be incorporated into the examples. Students replace the example's language with their own while maintaining the essential syntax of the the original. Since the originals can be endlessly copied and altered, a student always has the model at hand, a model that reinforces the effects of the slightest change on a sentence's meaning. A second benefit of these assignments allows me to teach and reinforce such elementary word processing concepts as deleting and adding words: two tasks that all revision encompasses.

The second task in this set--"Sentence Medley"--encourages a student to take any of the sentences created in the previous exercises and to try variations with them. (See appendix.) At last, the source for this activity is exclusively the student's own writing. However, the context for this assignment also capitalizes on all of the experiences of the previous work and applies it to a student's own work. While I don't expect students to run through eight variations for each sentence in an essay, they have a hint of what can be done and what rewards and even surprises await them.

All of the activities I have described rely only on a word processor's ability to delete or add words easily. In some cases, when the cut and paste function saves repetitive typing of the same text to be altered, I teach that concept. Each assignment can be programmed into our computer to prompt a student with what to do. In other computer configurations, the techniques I have described earlier will also work. I grant that all of this can be done without a computer. In fact, the source for these assignments has been the work I have been doing in my own classes for the past fourteen years. Still, I believe the work I have been describing helps students to think of revision as something more than mere recopying and helps them to move beyond mere correctness.

A second type of action that all word processing software has in common is the ability to insert text into a document and push the original text along as the new text is entered. While the previous exercises were more or less limited to inserting words and phrases, the next assignments use the insertion of sentences, even paragraphs to build toward an analytical essay. To begin, I use "The Gettysburg Address" to teach and to encourage the concept of inserting text longer than words or phrases. (See appendix.)

While most students are aware of what Lincoln said that day, I ask students to imagine what went through Lincoln's mind as he was giving the shortest speech of that day of speeches. To help them, I provide them with a copy of the address in their accounts (or on their diskette, or on a ditto) and ask them to insert the interior monologue Lincoln may have carried on with himself that day at that time. To distinguish their own writing from the text of the speech, students are directed to insert their text in capital letters.

An easy enough beginning and one that students take to pretty willingly if they are encouraged to be inventive or humorous. There are any number of variations and refinements of this basic assignment that can be used throughout the year. Others I have planned include speeches from Romeo and Juliet--a natural for parody, etc., Roethke's

"Dolor," Houseman's "To an Athlete Dying Young," and the obvious Browning sonnet. The hook here is that in order to toy with Shakespeare or anyone else, they must first understand what is being said in the text itself. Additionally, the assignments offer students a mask--a real bonus for students who often fear that they don't know what to think about something, but will gleefully blame a persona for the most outlandish, inventive, and even risky ideas--the best kind to encourage.

The principle behind this assignment easily establishes a second, more analytical voice. This new voice, one a students devises, can expand, comment, make ironic asides, or deny what is being spoken, but in all cases, it is essentially commenting, even analyzing what is being said. The next set of assignments introduces a second, separate commentator.

In the opening assignment, students are given a common enough situation from their own lives: They are being lectured to by an adult about something they've done wrong. They must write both the speech the parent or teacher is making as well as their own comments and thoughts about the validity, fairness, obvious lack of understanding, or the truth of their own position as they listen. Again, as in the previous assignment, they make a distinction between what is being said and what is being thought.

It's not too hard to imagine the remainder of this set of essays: one student writes the text of a speech by someone (a situation from the previous assignment may be altered or repeated) and another student writes the interior monologue or commentary. With this stage the assignments encourage a student to begin to react to another student's writings and all of the benefits of student writing groups become an important part of building a foundation for analysis.

So far, students have not been encouraged to write what we would call an analytical reaction. Rather, the tasks have explored imaginative situations that hew close to the persona of the text (as in the "Gettysburg Address") or the persona of the text's audience (an adolescent listening to yet another adult's version of the world). I have studiously chosen to avoid mentioning that a student may wish to react directly when reading the poem, speech, etc. This type of interior monologue I take to be the beginnings of analysis, especially what Stanley Fish calls reader-response criticism.

Before I go on, however, I want to recapitulate that all of these assignments have relied on the principle of inserting new text into old text, a job that every word processing software does easily and naturally. Additionally, there are other ways than merely inserting text to accom-

plish this. One certainly is to set up two columns of text: one containing the original; and the other, the interior monologue or commentary. With cutting and pasting, it would not take too much to see that the original text can be easily eliminated in favor of the keeping the comments. My own sense of how to sequence these assignments keeps in mind an image of the author's text receding into the background as the student's own ideas gradually become the foreground and eventually the primary text itself. With the computer screen as a frame, this metaphor helps me when I picture assignments for my students.

Rather than devote all of my time today to how I build to an essay that analyzes literature--I think that you can see the outline of my method from what I've said so far--I would like to turn to some other computer writing situations which assist pre-writing. Most encourage students to brainstorm with a computer and to use programs that our students have written that allow them to communicate to each other through their accounts. Because we have a multi-user system equipped with phone modems and about fifty terminals that can do word processing, our students have a great deal of access to the computer whenever they need one. When they sit down to work they can send and receive messages to other students, look up notes on a bulletin board for all users (this is an ingenious program written by

one of our students that we will use this coming year), talk with another terminal directly, or even set up a "conference call" among up to eight terminals that will also keep a written record of the "conversation" (an excellent way to overcome the problems of a group's secretary). With all of this access to the writings, ideas, and help of others, our students have ample ways to support each other and get the help they need.

Of course, I consider this setting to be an ideal one to work in: One that I know not too many of you can take advantage of. However, there are ways of overcoming the limitations of micro-computers by allowing students to copy each other's diskettes. They'll do it anyway, so you might as well capitalize on it. Which brings me to my last and current image for working with a computer: the electronic campfire.

If you have ever watched students work with computers, you will have doubtless noticed that they all gather around anyone who is either doing something good, funny, or exciting in some way, or is willing to teach others. After all, a terminal, like a campfire offers warmth and an inviting glow (cf. Gaston Bachelard's A Psychoanalysis of Fire). Around it, students are also willing to tell stories and exchange ideas with ease and comfort. Although the mythology of the computer as a dehumanizing influence is rampant,

I think that students see it, like a campfire, as a human moment: a moment of sharing and communicating. Getting them to write as a group with a terminal as the recorder is not too difficult, although I do not allow any of my students to talk to the screen (a habit all computer users fall into, generally when they become frustrated) and they may not hug it for warmth. After all, there ought to be some limits on how humanizing time with a computer can be.

Additionally, our system allows me to set up help files for specific assignments that all of my students can use. This can also be done with diskettes and, of course, with the old ditto. Some files that I use merely suggest transitions, linking words, or lists of words that assist with description, exposition, narration, or even simple organization by time, location or importance. These are relatively simple ones to do, since I often revise existing dittoes. Also, I have included hints on how to format the printer, do footnotes and use the spelling checker so that our students can get help designed specifically for the essay that are working on and find it quickly.

Finally, I have a great deal of fun doing live and in color (black and white for now) grammar sessions. In the old days I, too, used to prepare a wonderful overhead transparency to illustrate a salient grammar point. In class, we'd all play with revising it. I would stand there and use

an array of colored felt tip pens to cross out, insert, rearrange, or rewrite a sentence, or even a few sentences if I was brave. At the end of a session, I'd say something like, "how does the sentence look now. Doesn't it look better than before?" Of course, the overhead makes Jackson Pollack look like Mondrian.

My students are a tolerant bunch usually, and they would humor me by saying that the mess on the wall "looked" better, but they knew better. It all looked like a mess, and again an English teacher had asked them a paradoxical question.

Now I use a computer terminal with a large television screen hooked into the back to it and go "live" with "wide screen editing." At the end of a session now, when I ask if the sentence looks good: it does. There are no crossouts, only what the class has decided on as their final version. To them looking good sometimes has the impact of being good: A caution I need not mention too loudly here, but one that plagues people using computers.

These are only a few of the ways in which I have begun to incorporate the computer into my regular English writing curriculum. With each assignment that I devise, I seem to be able to think of even more uses: uses that I think are interesting and even more interesting to do because of the computer's role. Not only are my assignments becoming

better, I think, but I feel like writing more of them:
Enough of a bonus after fourteen years to make me continue
on beyond correctness.

Composition Topic: Erasmus Variations
Stegman

In the Renaissance, Erasmus challenged students in his writing classes to try their hands at writing as many variations of the following sentence as they could. He himself tossed of 150. while we won't try to exceed Erasmus' flurry, let's try our own with one key change.

When you write your variations, specify an author. The author can be a person we all know, living or dead, or someone from literature, TV, the movies, etc.

Here's the sentence that Erasmus used for his challenge:

(in Latin) Tuae litterae me magnopere delectarunt.

(in English, simply) Your letter has delighted me very much.

Here are some of his 150 variations:

Your epistle has cheered me greatly.
On reading your letter I was filled with joy.
When your letter came, I was seized with extraordinary pleasure.

Here are some variations from last year's classes:

Your letter is perfectly clear.
--Richard Nixon
by Jolene Danichevski

Your letter possessed my mind for days.
--Linda Blair
by Bobbi Bradley

Your letter came in handy.
--Venus de Milo
by Karen Kostiw

I lost my head over your letter.
--Marie Antoinette
by Jeanne Finneran

Your letter was good, but it could've been better.
--Dad
Anonymous

You're on your own--

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Composition Topic: Change in style
Stegman

A CHANGE IN STYLE,
HOWEVER, SLIGHT,
IS ALWAYS A CHANGE IN MEANING,
HOWEVER SLIGHT.

A TASK TO START WITH

Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes.
And he turned his thinking toward unknown arts.

The above is the epigraph for James Joyce's novel A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, and I have included a simple translation of this line from Ovid's Metamorphosis. Following is a list of possible meanings for each LATIN word. You may increase the range, if you wish, through a thesaurus. Take the syntax of the translation as a guide and play with substitutions. Take any two versions you've arrived at and explain their differences.

IGNOTAS (unknown) unknown. Some related meanings: ignoble, obscure, ignorant, not customary, not celebrated, not distinguished, unknown

ANIMUM (thinking) the spiritual principle of life in a person; the soul as seat of feelings, character, disposition, nature; courage, confidence, spirit(fire or vivacity in speech, etc.); the soul as seat of the will; resolve; consciousness; thought.

DIMITTIT (he turned) sends forth in different directions; dismiss; sends forth.

ARTES (arts) a trade; profession;art, dialectics; theory/knowledge of art; skill; cunning; cleverness; works of art; conduct; character; method of acting; good qualities; deceit.

ET (and) and

IN (toward) in; into; toward; upon; on; onto

Here are some examples from student work:

1. And he let his mind explore intricate deceptions.
2. And he sought out the bizarre.
3. And he began to prefer the occult.
4. And he found himself absorbed in strange knowledge.
5. And he left the known for the unknown.
6. And he became intrigued by cunning deceptions.
7. And he set out for unknown worlds.
8. And he found himself less interested in the commonplace.
9. The world began to bore him as he searched for forbidden knowledge.
10. He became another Faust.

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The analysis is only a start and really ought to be considered as a rough draft.

Two sentences to compare:

He became another Faust. And he set out for unknown worlds.

The use of "Faust" suggests a pact with the devil for some form of ultimate knowledge. That Faust in Marlowe's play learned nothing new, and in death forfeited his soul to Mephistopheles intimates that this quest for ultimate knowledge will also fail, and the seeker will lose all. Compared with the "unknown worlds" sentence, the "Faust" sentence is more pessimistic in its connotation because the words "unknown worlds" also carry with them the sense of excitement and wonder associated with voyages of discovery, even inner voyages. Further, there is certainly less of a suggestion of the illicit in "unknown worlds" than there is in the word "Faust." The two verbs indicate different stages of progress for each: "set out" is heavily weighed toward the start of a venture, while "became" puts us far beyond the first choice and at the first consequences of that choice. Finally, a Faust is doomed, while the other still has some hope for success, even if the voyage is a difficult one.

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Composition Topic: Sentence Medley
Stegman

Here are EIGHT--count 'em--eight variations on one sentence. Some changes are minute, but all are changes. I'm not sure the sentence is done, but I know a lot more about it now.

ORIGINAL:
Slumped over in the shopping cart was a sleeping three-year-old girl with a crust of animal crackers dried at the corners of her mouth.

1. Slumped over asleep in the shopping cart was a three-year-old girl with dried animal crackers crusting the corners of her mouth.

2. The three-year-old girl slumped over asleep in the shopping cart, animal crackers crusting the corners of her mouth.

3. The three-year-old girl, animal crackers crusting the corners of her mouth finally slumped over asleep in the shopping cart.

4. With animal crackers crusting the corners of her mouth, the three-year-old girl lay slumped over asleep in the shopping cart.

5. With animal crackers crusting the corners of her mouth, the three-year-old girl slumped over asleep in the shopping cart.

6. The three-year-old girl lay slumped over asleep in the shopping cart with animal crackers drying to a crust at the corners of her mouth.

7. The small child slept on in the shopping cart, the animal crackers crusting the corners of her mouth.

8. As the small child slept on in the shopping cart, the animal crackers dried to a crust at the corners of her mouth.

9. (I can't count.) As the animal crackers dried to a crust at the corners of her mouth, the small child slept on slumped over in the shopping cart.

10. She fell asleep in the chopping cart eating animal crackers. (Okay, but I couldn't resist this one.)

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English 11 Topic: Using the INSERT TEXT function
Stegman

Word has just leaked back through the cosmos that not only can the laws concerning the Conservation of Energy recapture from the ether the very words spoken by Abraham Lincoln when he delivered the "Gettysburg Address," but they can also recapture his very thoughts as he gave the speech. Fortunately for you, you are the only ones who can transcribe these thoughts and give to the world those deepest thoughts from one of the great minds of the nineteenth century.

Log into your account. There you can find a document called GETTY that you should recall using the Edit option from the menu.

When Lincoln's priceless prose appears on the screen, your task is to insert into the text the very words that were running or trotting through Lincoln's mind as he stood on the platform that day and read the "Gettysburg Address" from the back of an envelope.

The easiest way to record your version of Lincoln's thoughts is to use the ENTER INSERT key to insert text and push the speech along as you type. You MIGHT want to distinguish Lincoln's thoughts from what he spoke by typing all of the inserted text using CAPITALS (Press the CAPS LOCK key to do this.)

When you have finished, or if you wish me to take a quick peek at your work, send me a message in account 30,0.

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